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Public administration and development

Report of the Secretary-General**

Summary

As requested by the General Assembly in its resolution 58/231, the present report outlines proposals for commemorating, during the sixty-first session of the General Assembly in 2006, the tenth anniversary of the resumed fiftieth session of the General Assembly on public administration and development. It suggests that the commemoration could be an opportune time to evaluate the progress made in revitalizing public administration and to share successful experiences that have contributed to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. In that context, the report recalls the recommendations formulated by the Committee of Experts on Public Administration in April 2004 on repositioning and revitalizing public administration in order to accelerate progress in achieving development goals, and sets forth a number of benchmarks that could serve to guide countries in this process. It also draws the attention of the General Assembly to recommendations on preparatory and supporting actions that could be taken in connection with the observance of the anniversary, including hosting the Global Forum on Reinventing Government at United Nations Headquarters in 2006; devoting the high-level segment of the Economic and Social Council in 2006 to the changing role of administration; and celebrating United Nations Public Service Day and the presentation of the United Nations Public Service Awards in a more visible manner.

As requested in the same resolution, the report also describes activities under way to promote information exchange, research and the dissemination of successful practices and advisory services in public administration, and to support e-government initiatives in the African, Asian, Central American and Caribbean regions as a tool for development.

* A/59/150.
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I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 58/231, the General Assembly took note of the previous report of the Secretary-General (A/58/152) and requested the Secretary-General:

(a) To make proposals for commemorating the tenth anniversary of the resumed fiftieth session of the General Assembly on public administration and development, during the sixty-first session of the General Assembly, in 2006;

(b) To support information exchange and research and disseminate successful practices and advisory services in public administration that contribute to achieving the internationally agreed development goals, including those contained in the United Nations Millennium Declaration;

(c) To continue supporting the e-government initiatives in the African, Asian, Central American and Caribbean regions as a tool for development.

2. Pursuant to this request, and as a follow-up to the reports submitted by the Secretary-General in 2002 and 2003 (A/57/262 and A/58/152), the present report covers proposals and preparations for the tenth anniversary of the resumed fiftieth session of the General Assembly. It also addresses the work of the United Nations Programme on Public Administration, Finance and Development in research and advisory services for the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals, as well as in e-government initiatives.

II. Proposals for commemorating the tenth anniversary of the resumed fiftieth session of the General Assembly on public administration and development

Revitalizing public administration

3. In his report to the General Assembly at its fifty-seventh session (A/57/262), the Secretary-General emphasized the vital importance that an effective public administration can play in the implementation of internationally agreed development goals, including those contained in the Millennium Declaration. The message is even more valid today as efforts are being made to accelerate progress towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

4. The importance of focusing economic and social policies on achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, of increasing the flow of resources to developing countries and of developing accurate data to monitor the progress made has been rightly stressed in international forums. However, greater emphasis also needs to be placed on the need to strengthen public administration institutions, improve public sector human resources capacity, and foster knowledge creation and innovation and the utilization of information technology for development in public administration.

5. The commemoration of the tenth anniversary of the resumed fiftieth session of the General Assembly on public administration and development could be an opportune time to evaluate the progress made in revitalizing public administration and to share successful experiences that have contributed to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

6. The Committee of Experts on Public Administration, which held its third session in New York in April 2004, recommended that public administration be repositioned and revitalized, stressing that countries should focus reform of their public administration system on achieving conditions that will ensure and facilitate the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals.

7. In the light of the Committee's recommendations, the following are some benchmarks that could serve to guide countries in the process of public administration reform and revitalization:

(a) It is important that the fundamental mission of the public sector and public administration, particularly their role in ensuring peace, security, stability and the rule of law and in providing other public and social goods, be reaffirmed and redefined, including by creating an enabling environment for economic growth, sustainable development and social development, in keeping with the outcomes of the major United Nations summits and conferences. Governments should make consistent and focused efforts to integrate into public administration relevant practices of public management, along with principles of inclusiveness and equity, so as to build and promote public administration systems that are not only results-oriented, efficient and cost-effective, but also responsive, equitable and accountable to the public. Approaches to realizing this vision of public administration should be flexible and sensitive to particular social, political and economic environments.

(b) Striking an effective balance between centralization and decentralization of public administration to promote people-centred development should be a major focus of government attention. Decentralization can be key in promoting effective public services, equity and accountability. Decentralized governance, promoted in a number of countries, has been found to facilitate the participation of grass-roots populations and communities, with support from other national, regional and international actors, in the fight against poverty. However, decentralization may not always provide the solution to public administration challenges, and, by realizing economies of scale, centralization of certain public services may, in some instances, be more cost-effective. Therefore, an appropriate mix of centralization and decentralization needs to be sought, taking into account the specific circumstances of all stakeholders involved and the resources available.

(c) As part of decentralization, the public sector should consider establishing, within clear regulatory frameworks, partnerships with the private sector and civil society, and to provide training and orientation to partners on effectively engaging in a constructive dialogue on shared objectives with the public sector and with the international financial institutions. Accountability implies that the constituents of public services and their civil society representatives should not only be consulted, but should also have the right to monitor the progress of initiatives and, most important, should remain part and parcel of the final decision-making process. Partnership-building with the private sector and civil society can be an effective means to establish citizen commitment to and ownership of the Millennium Development Goals and poverty reduction strategies and to mainstream citizen concerns into policy processes, resulting, for example, in pro-poor budgets and revenue policies.[1] An enabling environment for partnerships should, therefore, be strengthened through innovative means, such as codes of accountability, and the necessary forums should be provided for Governments and civil society to carry on a constructive dialogue with other partners, both national and international, for the

design, the implementation and the monitoring of strategies and policies for economic and social development.

(d) A culture of research and innovation for improved public sector performance should be fostered, including the application of new information and communication technologies, consistent with the development of a modern knowledge society. Governments also need to pursue policies for the consolidation of a professional civil service and policies to attract, recruit and retain in the public sector the best possible human resources available on the market, including through competitive civil service remuneration.

(e) Public administration should be empowered, through such means as reorganizing institutions, promoting capacity-building and upgrading skills, to adapt the Millennium Development Goals to the national context, as part of the national development agenda, including national poverty reduction strategies. Additionally, databases should be developed on successful practices in support of public administration and public institution needs (including political institutions, such as parliaments), with particular attention paid to the role of, and the space for, public and private partners in fostering sustained economic growth and achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

Proposed actions for the tenth anniversary of the resumed fiftieth session of the General Assembly on public administration and development

8. In addition to making substantive recommendations on revitalizing public administration, the Committee of Experts on Public Administration reviewed various options regarding preparations for the tenth anniversary of the resumed fiftieth session of the General Assembly on public administration and development and recommended to the Economic and Social Council the following preparatory and supporting actions:

(a) Hosting the Global Forum on Reinventing Government at United Nations Headquarters in 2006;

(b) Devoting the high-level segment of the Economic and Social Council in 2006 to the changing role of public administration as an instrument of economic and human development, in the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals, with public service delivery as the pivotal element;

(c) Celebrating United Nations Public Service Day and the presentation of the United Nations Public Service Awards in a more visible manner with a view to highlighting the value of public service and promoting its positive achievements.

These three action areas are discussed below.

Global Forum on Reinventing Government

9. Pursuant to the request of the General Assembly in its resolution 57/277, the United Nations Programme on Public Administration, Finance and Development supports technically and substantively the Global Forum on Reinventing Government, which provides a platform for ministers, high-level officials,

regional/municipal leaders, representatives of civil society organizations and key stakeholders from developing countries and countries with economies in transition to exchange views and practical experiences related to the process of reform in public administration. The Global Forum on Reinventing Government is organized by the Government of the host country, with the support of the United Nations Programme on Public Administration, Finance and Development, and brings together the capacity of a number of United Nations entities and other international institutions. There are no costs involved for the United Nations regular budget. These forums have been successful in galvanizing the attention of government leaders and international actors on crucial issues related to partnerships for democracy and development.

10. The first Global Forum on Reinventing Government was launched in 1999 by the Government of the United States of America, and was held in Washington, D.C. Subsequent forums were then organized by the Governments of Brazil (on democratic institutions, 2000); Italy (on fostering democracy and development through e-government, 2001); Morocco (on partnerships for democracy and development, 2002); and Mexico (on innovations and quality, 2003). The Government of the Republic of Korea has agreed to host the sixth Global Forum in Seoul in May 2005, on the theme "Towards participatory and transparent governance". The seventh Global Forum could be hosted at United Nations Headquarters in 2006 under the same arrangements as in the past, namely without cost for the United Nations regular budget.

High-level segment of the Economic and Social Council in 2006

11. In recognition of the role of public service in the fulfilment of specific national goals for socio-economic development, the Committee of Experts on Public Administration held consultations with the Economic and Social Council on devoting one of its next high-level segments to the changing role of public administration for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, with public service delivery as the primary focus. The proposed theme for the segment is: "A service-oriented public administration for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals".

United Nations Public Service Day and Awards

12. Human resources development is a key ingredient in the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. Recruiting and retaining skilled, dedicated and highly motivated public servants with good ethics are essential for carrying out reforms at the local and global levels. In this spirit, the General Assembly, by its resolution 57/277, designated 23 June as the United Nations Public Service Day to celebrate the value and virtue of service to the community. Subsequently, the Economic and Social Council established the United Nations Public Service Awards, to be given annually on Public Service Day to recognize excellence and innovation in the public service.

13. The Awards have provided an opportunity to highlight successful innovations and practices in public administration. In 2004, the Awards ceremony on 23 June was marked by the presence of the President of the fifty-eighth session of the

General Assembly. Ministers from six countries — Italy, Mexico, Morocco, Qatar, the Republic of Korea and South Africa — participated in the meeting via videoconference. For the tenth anniversary of the resumed fiftieth session of the General Assembly on public administration and development, arrangements are being made to geographically widen participation in the Public Service Awards competition and to give more visibility to the Awards ceremony around the world. It is planned that the Secretary-General will chair the event and that high-level officials from all regions will be invited to participate.

III. Exchange of research, information and experiences and advisory services

14. In response to the request of the General Assembly in its resolution 58/231, that the Secretary-General support information exchange and research, disseminate successful practices and provide advisory services in public administration for the achievement of the internationally agreed development goals, the normative, analytical and technical cooperation activities of the United Nations Programme on Public Administration, Finance and Development are increasingly being oriented at policy advice and capacity-building, especially in the area of poverty reduction and improved delivery of public services. Some examples of the initiatives carried out in the past year are set out below.

A. Research

15. The 2003 interregional workshop on the theme "Engaged governance for pro-poor policies: South-South cooperation", undertaken by the United Nations Programme on Public Administration, Finance and Development jointly with the Government of Sri Lanka, through the Ministry of Policy Development and Implementation, explored the concept of innovative public administration arrangements, particularly "engaged governance", through a sharing of country/regional experiences. Engaged governance was defined as an approach to public policy and administration that enables the expression and the coordination of political, administrative and civic interests for the achievement of policy coherence, social justice and sustainable development. The workshop demonstrated the relevance of this approach to the formulation of pro-poor public policy for the Millennium Development Goals and proposed an action plan to further it with national and local agencies.

16. The Millennium Declaration underscores the importance of public sector capacity in order to eradicate poverty, protect the vulnerable and increase the participation of women and disadvantaged groups in policy decisions. Pursuant to this, an Asia-Pacific regional workshop on the theme "Governance challenges and innovations for human development in globalizing conditions" was organized jointly by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and the United Nations Programme on Public Administration, Finance and Development to disseminate tools, techniques and methodologies that can be employed to mainstream the concerns of the poor and the disadvantaged into the policy-making process of government.

17. As part of its efforts to promote tools and strategies that can help public institutions and policy processes, particularly to facilitate pro-poor interventions, the United Nations Programme on Public Administration, Finance and Development organized an expert group meeting on the participation of civil society in fiscal policy. A group of experts was invited to present specialized papers on the subject and discuss methodologies that may support a more participatory, transparent policy process, including the budgeting process.

18. The meeting delineated experiences of civil society participation and macroeconomic policy processes, the strengths and the weaknesses of these initiatives and various methodologies used to make the macroeconomic policy process more participatory and transparent. It demonstrated that, with a clear pro-poor orientation, both the budget process and the budget output can be directed to poverty reduction activities. In addition, pro-poor aspects of fiscal policy, such as making revenue and taxation systems less regressive and therefore less detrimental to the poor, through greater use of direct, as opposed to indirect, taxes, need to be emphasized. A publication based on the results of this expert group meeting on civil society participation in fiscal policy will be made available in print by the end of 2004.

19. The core competencies for the public sector of the twenty-first century differ in many ways from those of the past, especially as demands on public servants, in terms of skills, knowledge and competence, are rapidly increasing and becoming more complex. Top government leaders in developing countries are facing old challenges, while at the same time having to address new ones due to many social, economic and political challenges. In May 2004, an ad hoc expert group meeting was organized on the theme "Unlocking the human potential for public sector performance", where the role of human capital in revitalizing public administration, as well as challenges and trends in human resources management in the public sector environment, were critically discussed, especially as they relate to competencies for economic and social development. A number of recommendations were made, including attracting and retaining the best talent in the public sector, creating and maintaining a professional and responsive public service, developing leadership capacity, and improving the image of and revalidating public service contributions.

20. An ad hoc expert group meeting was organized in 2004 on the theme "Decentralized governance for effective and responsive service delivery: prerequisites, trends, approaches, policies and capacity-building strategies", during which critical issues related to decentralization and service delivery were discussed. For decentralization to be effective, its policies, legal frameworks and implementation strategies must be not only clear but also appropriate. They must provide a structural arrangement that can facilitate the participation of people in managing their development process. For decentralization to positively impact service delivery, adequate financing needs to be in place, including transparent and accountable management of resources. There needs to be adequate cooperation and collaboration at all levels (local government, central government and the communities) in order for decentralization to be effective, and there has to be constant monitoring and evaluation of service delivery to ensure the optimal utilization of resources. Finally, decentralization requires the public sector to take on a wide range of capacity-building activities to empower communities to pursue their own development.

B. Sharing of information and experiences

21. The United Nations Online Network on Public Administration and Finance (UNPAN) continues to serve as a pivotal source of information exchange, experience-sharing and on-the-job training in the area of public sector policy and management utilized by public offices, policy makers, public administration institutions and experts. As a global online information and knowledge network, UNPAN continues to facilitate capacity-building, dialogues among stakeholders at the national level and expanded collaboration among Member States, especially developing countries. Moreover, UNPAN provides ongoing access to the most innovative research, training practices, methodologies and technical assistance.

22. In partnership with the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), which has become an UNPAN online regional centre, a conference was held in May 2004 to address the needs and priorities of the countries of the Mediterranean region for introducing innovations into their public administration systems, with a particular focus on the Arab region. Possible expansion of the role of UNPAN in strengthening the capacity of national institutions in the Arab region was also explored.

23. The United Nations Programme on Public Administration, Finance and Development, in partnership with the United Nations Development Programme, decided to undertake a second phase of the Africa Governance Inventory project, starting in 2004. This collaboration was created in 1998 to respond to the need for a comprehensive database on governance programmes in Africa. Since 1999, 28 countries have participated in the project. Furthermore, the project has committed to contributing to the governance objectives of the New Partnership for Africa's Development, particularly enhancing dialogue with donors and providing an objective and reliable base for assessing governance performance.

24. The United Nations Public Service Awards competition constitutes an important initiative to promote innovation and to identify and share successful experiences in public administration. Such innovations promote equity by ensuring access to services, particularly by the vulnerable groups. They emphasize timeliness and courtesy, transparency in decision-making, professionalism and accountability to citizens, clients and other stakeholders. New methodologies and approaches to work are a radical departure from "business as usual", lowering costs and enhancing the quality of service, incorporating new information and communications technology and improving service delivery and interaction between public officials and the public at all levels of society.

C. Advisory services and capacity-building

25. The United Nations Programme on Public Administration, Finance and Development has been involved in two activities concerning the preparation of a methodological framework for the French-speaking sub-Saharan African region for the monitoring of poverty reduction strategy papers and the Millennium Development Goals, which is expected to be completed by the end of 2004. The monitoring of poverty reduction strategy papers and the Millennium Development Goals aims to take into account the qualitative perception of poverty, governance and environment dimensions and harmonization of indicators to allow international

comparisons. Another initiative intends to support the monitoring process in Mali at the national level. Links are currently being developed with regional monitoring of poverty reduction strategy papers and the Millennium Development Goals.

26. Support was provided in the area of capacity-building to revitalize public administration in Africa. The support, which was substantive, technical and financial, included the design and the adoption of the governance and public administration capacity-building programme, which was adopted by the African Union Assembly of Heads of State and Government in Maputo; the biennial Pan African Conference of Ministers of Public Service, which, under the banner of NEPAD, designs and reviews strategies for public service performance in Africa; the implementation of the Charter for the Public Service in Africa, integrating the Africa Governance Inventory into the Africa peer review mechanism process to facilitate monitoring and evaluation by the mechanism; and the design and implementation of the public sector leadership capacity development programme for good governance in Africa. Country initiatives and advisory services are being carried out within this framework in cooperation with UNDP.

27. In Latin America, a programme on capacity-building in social management for senior public officials is being implemented, with seminars being held in Argentina, Guatemala, Peru and Venezuela, aimed at assisting public agencies in the design and implementation of social service programmes.

28. The United Nations Programme on Public Administration, Finance and Development, in partnership with UNDP, organized a regional expert group meeting to promote a regional-level dialogue and cooperation among the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States, which will further strengthen country-level capacity-building in the area of corporate social responsibility. Similar initiatives have also been undertaken in India with the UNDP India Country Office and the Confederation of Indian Industries to articulate corporate social responsibility issues and to develop a regulatory framework for promoting a corporate social responsibility framework in the country.

IV. E-government initiatives in the African, Asian, Central American and Caribbean regions

29. The Millennium Declaration calls on all Member States to ensure that the benefits of new technologies, especially information and communication technology (ICT), are available to all. The strategic use of ICTs in government serves as an important tool in meeting the Millennium Development Goals, as it can result in a more inclusive, effective, efficient, transparent and accountable public administration, which in turn can improve economic development and competitiveness. Moreover, in enhancing the quality and the delivery of public services through ICT, especially in the areas of education, health, social security and social welfare, Governments may be better positioned to reduce poverty, address inequality and promote sustainable development. Equally important, e-government can offer new channels for participation and engagement in the political process and greater consultation in the decision-making process, and can enhance prospects for deepening democracy. Rural areas can benefit from e-government through community information technology centres at district and village levels, as experiences in countries such as India and Egypt have made clear. In this respect,

the following initiatives demonstrate the support of the United Nations Programme on Public Administration, Finance and Development to e-government as an effective tool for development.

30. The Shanghai Municipal People's Government, in partnership with the United Nations Programme on Public Administration, Finance and Development and other institutions, such as UNDP, the United Nations Information and Communication Technologies Task Force and the International Telecommunication Union, organized a forum on the theme "City informatization in the Asia-Pacific region". The forum has been successfully held for three consecutive years (2000, 2001 and 2002), with participants from more than 20 international organizations covering Asia, Europe, America, Australia and Africa. It continues to provide a platform for government leaders, decision makers and policy developers, business leaders and entrepreneurs, and technical professionals and experts worldwide to exchange visions, policies and strategies, technologies and products, and practices and experiences, in order to stimulate economic and social development through city informatization in the Asia-Pacific region and worldwide, and to promote inter-country, regional and international cooperation, particularly South-South cooperation, and, accordingly, to bridge the digital divide of the world. Particular attention was given to strategies to bridge the digital divide and to the emerging needs and trends worldwide in ICT development.

31. In recognition of the importance of ICT and e-government to national and regional development, the United Nations Programme on Public Administration, Finance and Development in partnership with the Caribbean Centre for Development Administration (CARICAD), a specialized institution of the Caribbean Community, has organized ministerial consultations for the past four years on the themes of ICT and e-government. The ministerial consultations are part of a broader initiative for administrative reform and e-government capacity-building by the countries of the Caribbean region and CARICAD, the Government of Italy and the United Nations Programme on Public Administration, Finance and Development. These consultations provide an opportunity for further dialogue, commitment and closer cooperation at the regional level on government policies and strategies for the application of ICT in the public sector. The Fifth Caribbean Ministerial Consultation on Regional Cooperation for E-Government Capacity Building, on the theme "Action-oriented e-government strategy for countries of the Caribbean region, 2004-2007", was held in Porters, St. James, Barbados, in June 2004.

32. The United Nations Programme on Public Administration, Finance and Development provided support to the E-Government Task Force for Central America, which was endorsed by the Central American Vice-Presidents at their February 2003 meeting. The Task Force inaugurated its activities at a meeting in Honduras in August 2003, during which its terms of reference and a blueprint for future action were developed. The primary mandate of the Task Force is the creation and the implementation of a regional strategic plan of action on e-government in Central America and the formulation of specific projects aimed at strengthening the institutional capacity of the Central American governance system, especially of regional, central and local government institutions, to improve policy-making, coordination and delivery of public goods and services using ICTs.

33. The United Nations Programme on Public Administration, Finance and Development continues to produce analytical tools and develop policy notes and

reports on current and cutting-edge e-government issues. One such example is the *World Public Sector Report 2003: E-Government at the Crossroads*. The report, which was preceded by the United Nations Global e-Government Survey (2003), underlined the importance of adopting information and communication technologies for developing and developed countries. Estimates show that in most countries, only one in five persons with Internet access engage in government online. The report also expressed particular concern about the lack of access by women, the poor and other disadvantaged groups and suggested a framework for e-government prioritization that takes into account the Millennium Declaration campaign for reducing poverty and meeting basic human needs.

34. The United Nations Programme on Public Administration, Finance and Development continues to address both the opportunities and the challenges of e-government through analysis and building government capacity to develop national e-government strategies and action plans. One example is the e-government for development programme, funded by the Government of Italy, which seeks to carry out needs assessments and implement specific e-government projects in priority areas in a number of countries in Africa, the Middle East and Eastern Europe.

V. Recommendation

35. **With respect to the commemoration of the tenth anniversary of the resumed fiftieth session of the General Assembly on public administration and development, the General Assembly may wish to take note of the proposals contained in paragraph 8 above.**

Notes

[1] For a review of participation in the poverty reduction strategy papers process, see "Participation in poverty reduction strategy papers: a retrospective study", World Bank (January 2002). This review by Bank staff includes a summary of external assessment of participation in poverty reduction strategy papers carried out by a number of non-Bank institutions, including civil society organizations.